

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1 1. A multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of a
2 video program by an end user, the multi-channel video distribution system comprising:
3 a program distribution system adapted to provide programs to one or more end
4 user viewing devices, wherein the programs are distributed according to a linear schedule
5 including multiple channels that simultaneously distribute programs;
6 a viewing control system in communication with the program distribution
7 system and the end user viewing devices, the viewing control system, comprising:
8 a parental control programming system adapted to receive parental
9 control rules from an end user, the parental control rules defining program viewing
10 limits for one or more time periods; and
11 a program viewing limit control system adapted to:
12 count a number of viewings of a program during the one or
13 more time periods;
14 determine whether the number of viewings exceeds the defined
15 program viewing limits for the one or more time periods; and
16 prevent further viewings of the program if the number of
17 viewings exceeds the defined program viewing limits for the one or more time
18 periods.

1 2. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of
2 the video program by the end user as recited in claim 1, wherein the parental control rules
3 define program viewing limits based on one or more criteria selected from the group
4 consisting of time period, program content, or a combination of time period and program
5 content.

1 3. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of
2 the video program by the end user as recited in claim 2, wherein the program viewing limits
3 can be set to zero for adult content.

1 4. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of
2 the video program by the end user as recited in claim 2, wherein the program viewing limits
3 can be set high for educational content.

1 5. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of
2 the video program by the end user as recited in claim 2, wherein the program viewing limits
3 can be set low for a time period after school.

1 6. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of
2 the video program by the end user as recited in claim 2, wherein the program viewing limits
3 can be set low for a late night time period.

1 7. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of
2 the video program by the end user as recited in claim 1, wherein the parental control
3 programming system is adapted to receive and implement defined parental control rules for a
4 plurality of end users, and wherein the program viewing limit control system is adapted to
5 apply the defined parental control rules to each of the plurality of end users.

1 8. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of
2 the video program by the end user as recited in claim 1, wherein the program distribution
3 system comprises a system selected from the group including a cable programming
4 transmission network, a satellite programming transmissions network, or an audio or video
5 server connected to the Internet.

1 9. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of
2 the video program by the end user as recited in claim 1, wherein the viewing control system
3 comprises a server located at a program service provider.

1 10. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of
2 the video program by the end user as recited in claim 1, wherein the viewing control system
3 is configured with the program distribution system.

1 11. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of
2 the video program by the end user as recited in claim 1, wherein the viewing control system
3 comprises a computing device at an end user location in communication with a server located
4 at a program service provider.

1 12. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of
2 the video program by the end user as recited in claim 11, wherein the computing device
3 comprises a device selected from the group including a set-top box, a personal video recorder

(PVR), a video server, a television having set-top box and/or PVR functionality built therein, a personal digital assistant (PDA), a portable media center, a portable viewing device, and a personal computing device.

13. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of the video program by the end user as recited in claim 1, wherein the programs comprise programs selected from group including pay per view video on demand (VOD) programs, near VOD programs, subscription VOD, cable television programs, terrestrially broadcast programs, satellite television programs, and music programs.

14. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of the video program by the end user as recited in claim 1, wherein the time period can be based on years, months, weeks, days, portions of days, or hours.

15. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of the video program by the end user as recited in claim 14, wherein the portions of days comprise morning, afternoon, evening, night and prime time viewing period.

16. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of the video program by the end user as recited in claim 1, wherein the one or more end user viewing devices comprises a device selected from the group including a television set, a set-top box, a personal video recorder (PVR), a computer, a personal digital assistant (PDA), a wireless phone, a portable media center, or any combination of these devices.

17. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of the video program by the end user as recited in claim 1, wherein the viewing control system is adapted to:

count a number of viewings viewed using all of the one or more end user viewing devices; and

prevent further viewings for all of the one or more end user viewing devices if the number of viewings exceeds the viewing limit for the time period.

18. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of the video program by the end user as recited in claim 1, wherein the viewing control system is adapted to:

count a number of viewings viewed by each of the one or more end user viewing devices separately; and
prevent further viewings for each of the one or more end user viewing devices separately if the number of viewings for the one or more viewing devices exceeds the viewing limit for the time period.

19. The multi-channel video distribution system for controlling viewing of the video program by the end user as recited in claim 1, wherein the program is delivered as part of a linear schedule of programs.

20. In a multi-channel video distribution system for delivering video program content to end users as part of a linear schedule of simultaneously available program, a method for controlling viewing of programs by an end user, the method comprising steps of:

receiving parental control rules from an end user, the parental control rules defining program viewing limits for one or more time periods;

counting a number of viewings of a program during the one or more time periods;

determining whether the number of viewings exceeds the defined program viewing limits for the one or more time periods; and

preventing further viewings of the program if the number of viewings exceeds the defined program viewing limits for the one or more time periods.

21. The method for controlling the viewing of programs by the end user as recited in claim 20, wherein the parental control rules define program viewing limits based on one or more criteria selected from the group consisting of time period, program content, or a combination of time period and program content.

22. The method for controlling the viewing of programs by the end user as recited in claim 21, wherein the program viewing limits can be set to zero for adult content.

23. The method for controlling the viewing of programs by the end user as recited in claim 21, wherein the program viewing limits can be set high for educational content.

1 24. The method for controlling the viewing of programs by the end user as
2 recited in claim 21, wherein the program viewing limits can be set low for a time period after
3 school.

1 25. The method for controlling the viewing of programs by the end user as
2 recited in claim 21, wherein the program viewing limits can be set low for a late night time
3 period.

1 26. The method for controlling the viewing of programs by the end user as
2 recited in claim 20, wherein the step of receiving parental control rules comprises receiving
3 defined parental control rules for each of a plurality of end users, and wherein the method
4 further comprises applying the defined parental control rules to each of the plurality of end
5 users.

1 27. The method for controlling the viewing of programs by the end user as
2 recited in claim 20, wherein the programs comprise programs selected from group including
3 pay per view video on demand (VOD) programs, near VOD programs, subscription VOD,
4 cable television programs, satellite television programs, terrestrially broadcast programs, and
5 music programs.

1 28. The method for controlling the viewing of programs by the end user as
2 recited in claim 20, wherein the one or more time periods can be based on years, months,
3 weeks, days, portions of days, or hours.

1 29. The method for controlling the viewing of programs by the end user as
2 recited in claim 28, wherein the portions of days comprise morning, afternoon, evening, night
3 and prime time viewing period.

1 30. The method for controlling the viewing of programs by the end user as
2 recited in claim 20, wherein the one or more end user viewing devices comprises a device
3 selected from the group including a television set, a set-top box, a personal video recorder
4 (PVR), a computer, a PDA, a cellular phone, or any combination of these devices.

1 31. The method for controlling the viewing of programs by the end user as
2 recited in claim 20, wherein the step of counting a number of viewings comprises counting a
3 number of viewings viewed using all of the one or more end user viewing devices, and

wherein the step of preventing further viewings comprises preventing further viewings for all of the one or more end user viewing devices if the number of viewings exceeds the viewing limit for the time period.

32. The method for controlling the viewing of programs by the end user as recited in claim 20, wherein the step of counting a number of viewings comprises counting a number of viewings viewed by each of the one or more viewing devices separately, and wherein the step of preventing further viewings comprises preventing further viewings for each of the one or more viewing devices separately if the number of viewings for the one or more viewing devices exceeds the viewing limit for the time period.

33. A video distribution system for controlling viewing of a video program by an end user, where the video program is distributed as part of a schedule of programs, the multi-channel video distribution system comprising:

means for distributing programs to one or more end user viewing devices;

means for receiving parental control rules from an end user, the parental control rules defining program viewing limits for one or more time periods;

means for counting a number of viewings of a program during the one or more time periods;

means for determine whether the number of viewings exceeds the defined program viewing limit for the one or more time periods; and

means for preventing further viewings of the program if the number of viewings exceeds the defined program viewing limit for the one or more time periods.

34. The video distribution system for controlling viewing of the video program by the end user, where the video program is distributed as part of the schedule of programs as recited in claim 33, further comprising an advertising screen presented if the number of viewings exceeds the defined program viewing limit for the one or more time periods.

35. The video distribution system for controlling viewing of the video program by the end user, where the video program is distributed as part of the schedule of programs as recited in claim 33, wherein the program is removed from listings an interactive program guide when the program reaches the defined viewing limit.